

Teacher Shortage in Kenya: Trends and Policy Implications

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Abstract

An important implementation means of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the need to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030 and the recognition that teachers are the key to achieving all of the SDG 4 outcome targets. A shortage and uneven distribution of professionally trained teachers especially in disadvantaged areas might undermine the achievement of SDG 4. In the decades following self-rule, Kenya has steadily increased the supply of trained teachers in the job market with the number of unemployed trained teachers likely to surpass the number employed by government. Yet, there is inadequate number of teachers in the public schools and disparities exist in the initial teacher training and deployment with some communities yet to produce a single trained teacher. This paper examines the trends in teacher shortages at the primary and secondary levels and its implications on staffing classrooms in Kenya.

KEYWORDS: Teacher shortage, Teacher recruitment, Teacher deployment, Teacher employment, Teacher training

Introduction

The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) adopted in 1990 committed countries to improve the quality of education. It recognized that ensuring universal access to primary education would be the first step in enabling education to contribute fully to the development of individuals and society. The Dakar Framework for Action adopted in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Senegal declared that every child has the right to access an education of good quality. It affirmed that quality was central to education and a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement.

Both Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action must be realized within the context of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). One of the outcome targets of SDG 4 is for countries to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. This means countries such as Kenya should provide 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education without discrimination. To achieve this universal primary and secondary education, SDG 4 proposes countries to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030 and recognizes that teachers are the key to achieving all of the SDG 4 outcome targets. The equity gap in education is normally worsened by the shortage and uneven distribution of professionally trained teachers, especially in disadvantaged areas. Since teachers are a necessary condition for guaranteeing quality education, they should be professionally trained, adequately

recruited and remunerated, motivated, and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems.

Definitions

In its Indicators of National Education Systems (INES) project, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines a teacher as: “a person whose professional activity involves the transmission of knowledge, attitudes and skills that are stipulated to students enrolled in any educational programme” (Siniscalco, 2002, p. 46). “Professional activity” in the definition assumes that teaching as an occupation exhibits the characteristics of the ‘professional model’, which include rigorous training and licensing requirements, positive working conditions, an active professional organization or association, substantial workplace authority, relatively high compensation, and high prestige (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008).

To qualify for entry into the teaching profession requires credentials obtained after completion of an officially sanctioned training program and passage of examinations. In line with the professional model, the ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act of USA defines a ‘qualified teacher’ as one who has full state certification or a pass score on state teacher examination and who receives professional development “which improves subject matter knowledge, aligns with standards, and improves instructional strategies based on scientifically based research” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 96).

In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission Act 2012 mandates the Commission to register all qualified teachers before they can teach in any public or private institution. The Commission considers a qualified teacher as one with academic and professional certificates obtained from a teacher training institution. To teach at the primary level, one must have obtained a C mean grade in the final secondary examination (KCSE) and attended a two-year primary teacher training course. A teacher at the secondary level must have obtained C+ mean grade and attend a three-year diploma course or a four-year bachelor of education course. The Certificate of Registration issued by the Commission to the teacher is a license to teach.

An insufficient quantity of qualified and licensed teachers to fill teaching positions in subject specialisms, schools, and geographical regions results in a ‘teacher shortage’ (Cobbold, 2015). This definition encompasses shortage factors including inadequate supply relative to demand, unfilled vacancies, teacher overloads and deployment of non-specialists (Gray & Behan, 2005). Ingersoll (2003) observes that, in addition, teacher shortage is due to a large number of qualified teachers departing their jobs for reasons other than retirement.

Trends in Teacher Shortage in Kenya

The history of teacher shortage in Kenya dates back to the colonial era when German missionaries introduced western education to Kenya in 1847. The first mission station and school in Kenya was opened at Rabai near the coastal town of Mombasa. As the missionaries moved inland from the coast, they established new schools and trained new teachers. The schools provided two levels of education, standard 1 to 4 was primary school, and standard 5 to 8 was intermediate school.

Those who completed the intermediate level were trained and awarded Elementary Teacher Certificate that enabled them to teach at primary school level (Nyankanga, Joshua, Wekesa, Ongaga, & Orina, 2013).

To help in the development of education provided by Christian missionaries, the colonial government, following the recommendation of the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924, promised to offer, within ten years, a full primary course for undergraduate teachers to ensure adequate supply of trained teachers. The initiatives in early 20th century aimed at staffing primary schools, the education level available in Kenya at the time.

There were also initiatives aimed at generating teachers for secondary schools as demand for secondary education arose due to pupils completing primary school. Two such initiatives were the Teachers for East Africa (TEA) and Teacher Education in East Africa (TEEA) projects. Gold (2004) writes that the two projects commissioned in 1961 by a joint British and American endeavor, aimed at providing teachers for secondary schools and teacher training colleges for the fast-expanding school systems in East Africa. By 1972, TEA and TEEA supplied 631 British and American teachers for secondary schools and teacher training colleges in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The project was instrumental in expanding secondary school education in preparation for independence in the three countries.

By 1963 when Kenya attained self-rule, 10,438 of 37,923 teachers employed in primary schools did not receive any form of professional teacher training. The untrained teachers who formed about 28% of the teaching force in primary schools were allowed to pursue in-service training as they continued teaching. The in-service program started in 1964 at the recommendation of the then Kenya Education Commission was a correspondence tutorial course offered through a radio programme. Later the government established the Correspondence Course Unit (CCU) through the institute of Adult Studies of Nairobi University College to conduct the in-service training (Court & Ghai, 1974).

The change from the 4-5 to the 7-4-2-3 system of education after independence increased the need for more teacher training institutions. By 1969 there were 24 primary teacher-training colleges and two diploma colleges (Kenyatta College, 1965 and Kenya Science Teachers' College, 1966) and University of Nairobi College that trained secondary school teachers. The shortage of teachers in 1969 stood at 1,449. However, in 1970 the number of trained teachers reached 2,500. In order to meet the demand created by the 1970-1974 educational development plan that almost doubled school enrolment, the number of trained teachers rose from 2,900 to 3,475 between 1971 and 1974 (Nyankanga et al., 2013).

A presidential decree on 12th December 1973, aiming to introduce free primary education (FPE), ordered the provision of free education for children in standard 1- 4. As a result, the enrolment in primary schools rose from 1.8 million in 1973 to 2.8 million in January 1974 (Ojiambo, 2009). The leap in enrolment caused a very high teacher/pupil ratio of 1:150 in some schools. The decree came when the country was already experiencing acute shortage of trained teachers. In 1973, the teaching force stood at 56,000 teachers, out of whom 12,600 were untrained. In 1974, an additional 25,000 teachers were required to meet the new demand. To mitigate the shortfall, the decree also recommended more recruitment of teachers. Since there

were no unemployed trained teachers, many unemployed school leavers, some of who had not done well at form II and IV levels were recruited in large numbers as teachers. As a result, by 1975 out of a teaching force of 90,000 the unqualified teachers accounted for 40,000 (Ojiambo, 2009; Sifuna, 1992). With 40% of its teachers untrained, the Ministry of Education was under great pressure to address the challenge of quality teaching.

Another presidential decree in 1978, declared the remainder of primary education (standard 5–7) free, leading to a 23.5% increase in enrolment in 1979. While this development did not cause a significant increase in the number of schools, it led to an increase in enrolment at Teacher Training Colleges to meet the need for more trained teachers (Sifuna, 1992).

The objective of the presidential decrees was to offer FPE in order to increase enrolment of pupils generally and offer schooling opportunities, particularly to poor communities and regions in the arid and semi-arid lands that were neglected under the colonial government. The decrees were, however, counter-productive in the long run as many children dropped out of school as a result of introduction of what was called “building levy” which turned out to be more exorbitant than the school fees charged prior to the decrees (Ojiambo, 2009). The surge in enrolment exerted a lot of pressure on the existing learning infrastructure, as the available classrooms could not accommodate the extra pupils. Faced with the challenge of inadequate classrooms, school committees introduced the “building levy”. Introduction of the levy frustrated many parents who could not afford but to withdraw their children from school. While the decrees attempted in spirit to abolish tuition fees and provide opportunities for access to primary education, they hardly succeed in practice. Consequently, for the next thirty years poor children’s chances of getting an education were limited as only children whose parents could afford to pay the levies imposed by schools could benefit.

Thirty years after the Presidential decree of 1973, another political intervention would re-introduce the FPE agenda. The challenge of teacher shortage becomes visibly inherent as the country struggles with the implementation of FPE. On January 6, 2003 the Minister for Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) re-launched FPE to fulfill the election promise of the new NARC government. The main objective of FPE was to recognize education as a basic right of all children as articulated in the Children’s Act of 2001. Fees and levies for tuition were abolished as the government and development partners pledged to meet the cost of basic educational materials as well as salaries for non-academic staff and co-curricular activities (Sifuna, 2005). Unlike the 1970s decrees, the FPE under NARC government did not require parents to build new schools, but refurbish and utilize existing facilities within their areas. Before the NARC government pronouncement, the number of primary schools in the country had increased steadily from 14,864 in 1990 to 18,901 in 2002 representing a 27% increase. Enrolments had also gone up from 5.4 to 6.3 million, being a 17% rise over the same period. The percentage of girls’ enrolment had also increased in the same period to 49%, implying that gender parity in enrolment in primary schools at the national level was being achieved. The primary school Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs), however, showed a very worrying trend in North Eastern Province where boys constituted 16% and girls 10%, with an average

of 13% for the province. Following the NARC government decree, it was estimated that the NER rose from around 6.3 to 7.6 million by the end of 2003, representing a 22% increase nationally in a single year.

Teacher shortage again emerged as a major challenge to the success of the re-introduced FPE with teacher-learner ratio reported on average at 1:75 (Ogola, 2010). According to Teachers Service Commission (TSC) estimates as of April 2012, the number of teachers fell short by 70,420 in total, or 37,341 for primary and 33,079 for secondary education (Takimoto, 2012). The gap in the teacher-pupil ratio continued to widen as enrolment at the primary school and post primary school levels were projected to grow by 1.3 percent and 7.2 per annum, respectively, between 2015 and 2019 (TSC, 2015). Between 2010 and 2015 primary teacher population outgrew the pupil enrolment rate as the number of teachers increased by 16.2% compared to 3.9% growth in total pupil enrolment. During the same period secondary teacher population increased by 28.6% while student enrolment grew by 36%. However, despite the rise in the number of primary teachers relative to growth in enrolment rate, the net teacher shortage grew by 50% from 61,235 in 2010 to 92,000 in 2015 (TSC, 2015).

In October 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Education told the National Assembly Committee on Education that Kenya was facing a shortage of 87,489 teachers, with primary schools needing 39,913 teachers and secondary schools having a deficit of 47,576 teachers. The cabinet secretary also stated that 290,000 teachers were serving about 10.2 million learners in 28,000 public secondary and primary schools in 2016 (Wanzala, 2016).

As the teacher shortage continued to grow over time, the government kept employing teachers at an average of 5,000 teachers per annum between 2014 and 2018 (see table 1). At the end of the five-year period the government employed 28,843 teachers including the recruitment of 8,700 teachers for secondary schools in 2018 to cope with the surge in secondary student population due to the new policy of 100% transition of pupils from primary to secondary school. The total recruitment for this period was only 30% of the estimated teacher shortage of 96,345 by June 2018. This recruitment drive was however largely aimed at easing shortages emanating from teacher attrition due to retirement, deaths and those departing public school teaching to take up jobs in other sectors. Recruiting at this rate, it is unlikely the government will close the gap in teacher demand by the public-school sector.

Table 1: Trends in recruitment of teachers 2014 - 2018

YEAR	INSTITUTIONS		TOTAL
	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	
2014	2,479	2,521	5,000
2015	2,481	2,662	5,143
2016	1,225	3775	5,000
2017	2,205	2,795	5,000
2018	-	8700	8700

Total	8,390	20,453	28,843
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Source: TSC Data 2018

Despite the steady growth in pupil enrolment and total learner transition from primary to secondary, TSC expects teacher shortage between 2019 and 2023 to reduce marginally overall and at primary level while remaining constant at the secondary level (see table 2). However, this projection can only hold if the current recruitment rate of teachers at 5000 teachers annually is significantly increase to surpass the enrolment rates at both school levels.

Table 2: Net projections on teacher shortages (2019 – 2023)

Projections in Teacher Shortage (2019-2023)			
Year	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
2019	37,410	61,671	99,081
2020	36,777	61,671	98,448
2021	36,155	61,671	97,826
2022	35,543	61,671	97,214
2023	34,941	61,671	96,612

Source: TSC Data 2018

Although official data shed light on the state of teacher population at the national level, they do not disclose large within-country imbalances in the distribution of teachers. These imbalances are revealed by studies conducted in different regions of the country. The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is an important measure for assessing teacher shortages and deployment imbalances. In the absence of a global target on PTR in primary education, the most widely used international benchmark is 40:1 and a ratio of 30:1 is often employed for secondary education although in Kenya secondary teachers are deployed based on the calculation from the curriculum of each school on the basis of one teacher per 27 lessons (Curriculum Based Establishment). Takimoto (2012) reported that while the national primary PTR increased on average from 39:1 in 2003 to 46:1 in 2009, there were large disparities among regions. For example, while Eastern and Central regions had 39:1 in 2007, the Northeastern region recorded a PTR of 63:1. Uwezo (2011) also reported similar findings of teacher shortage being highest in Western and Northeastern regions and lowest in Central. In Northeastern region where the PTR was 65:1, a teacher handled 25 children more than a teacher in Central province. In Western the PTR stood at 64:1.

At the secondary school level, a shortage of teachers in specific subjects in the Humanities, Kiswahili, Physics and Computer Studies have been reported (TSC, 2019). There is concern that Physics and Computer studies teachers are departing teaching to join non-teaching sector jobs. Schools experiencing teacher shortages employ coping strategies such as employing temporary teachers (paid by parents), engaging untrained individuals such as former students, overloading existing teachers, merging classes per grade and congesting classrooms to temporarily mitigate the problem (Joyce, Kosgei, & Kitainge, 2014; Kasau, 2012; Kenya, 2008; Ruto et al., 2010).

Implications

While the government hopes to sustain continuous teacher recruitment between 2019 and 2023, the implementation of a new curriculum, Competency Based Curriculum, rolled out in 2019 is expected to significantly increase the demand for teachers. To meet future teacher demand, the government will be unable to rely solely on hiring teachers on permanent basis due to the prevailing pressure to reduce public sector spending. The government is therefore prompted to consider cost-cutting temporary teacher recruitment strategies such as hiring of contract teachers, part-time engagements and teacher internship programmes. Fortunately, Kenya has an adequate pool of trained unemployed teachers available to take up temporary teaching engagements. Recent data from the TSC indicate that the number of unemployed trained teachers, standing at 309,000 as of April 2019, will soon surpass the 317,010 teachers in permanent public-school service because the number of college graduates joining the profession annually is more than the number absorbed by the employer (Nyaundi, 2019).

However, such temporary engagements raise concerns about quality and equity, as this category of teachers are likely to be job insecure and receive considerably lower salaries than permanent teachers. The key policy challenge for the government will be to keep the flexibility and cost-effectiveness that contract teaching may offer, while ensuring that quality and teacher motivation are not compromised by the dual teacher management system.

Teacher shortages and deployment imbalances in Kenya have been attributed to budgetary constraints; insecurity in certain regions; teacher preferences for stations; desire to be with families; and health issues (TSC, 2019). Insecurity is a major determinant of teacher attrition in the Northeastern region due to repeated attacks on non-local teachers by the Somalia-based armed group, Alshabab, whose members cross the border into Kenya to carry out attacks (Odhiambo, Wasike & Kimokoti, 2015; Scott-Villiers et al., 2015). In the Rift Valley region, tribal clashes over farming and grazing lands have led teachers to abandon the conflict areas (Ndiwa, 2011).

Teachers also have preferences for where they wish to work. For instance, experienced teachers are more likely to request to be transferred to teach in their home counties or urban and richer municipalities, leaving positions in remote and rural areas for new and inexperienced teachers. Such is the case of Northeastern counties of Garissa, Mandera and Wajir which heavily rely on the service of non-local teachers due to local ethnic teacher shortage in the teaching pipeline. In this region, the turnover of the non-local teachers remains high as they often get transferred out of these counties to their home counties within five years of service (Abdi, 2019). The departing non-local teachers are later replaced by new and mostly inexperienced non-local teachers who will within a few years be replaced by others.

Despite the large and expanding pool of trained unemployed teachers in the country, there are within-country disparities in the number of locals who get into the teacher pipeline across counties. Communities that have been historically marginalized especially those in the nomadic counties are less likely to have an adequate number of their own candidates joining teacher training colleges. Teachers Service Commission data show that while many communities are under represented in the teaching profession, at least 11 tribal communities are yet to produce a single teacher (Awich,

2019).

Recently, in October 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Education while making a case for the need to lower the entry grades to primary and diploma teacher training colleges for 14 marginalized nomadic counties cited the acute shortage of trained teachers from within the local nomadic communities as a major barrier in the delivery of quality basic education to children in these communities (A. Mohamed, personal communication, October 15, 2018). All the indicators of school participation i.e. access, enrolment, retention, completion and transition in the 14 nomadic counties are far below the National average (Ministry of Education, 2014). How to adequately staff classrooms in these counties is a major policy challenge for the government because teachers from other ethnic communities are less likely to work for long in these counties. For example, between 2013 and 2018, a total of 3,024 teachers fled from the Counties of Mandera, Wajir and Garissa due to heightened insecurity. One of the policy options considered by the Cabinet Secretary was to lower the entry grades to primary teacher training and diploma teacher training for prospective teacher trainees from the Nomadic counties. While this step was taken out of necessity, it was opposed by the Teachers Service Commission which contested the Cabinet Secretary's powers of setting minimum qualifications for entry to teaching colleges and argued that lowering the college entry grade would compromise the quality of the teaching profession. However, the Commission, despite its pushback, did not offer policy options to bridge the marked across-county imbalances in teacher training opportunities.

Recommendations

1. The National government should implement policies and strategies that will ensure teaching is attractive to qualified candidates from disadvantaged communities in counties with evidence of ethnic teacher shortages. Affirmative action on teacher trainee recruitment is the first step in producing local teachers who will be deployed within their own communities as they are more likely to live and work in rural areas and be socially and culturally akin to the students and parents in the schools where they teach.
2. County governments of the counties affected by local teacher shortages should invest in "grow-our-own teachers" initiative to produce teachers from within their communities by encouraging local secondary graduates to join teaching. The County governments should offer college bursaries to attract qualified recruits into the profession.
3. Trained teachers should be encouraged to work in areas where they are most needed through a combination of targeted incentives such as higher pay, extra allowances, good housing, better working conditions and an attractive career path that accelerates their promotion.

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